

# Veterans' Health Today

WINTER 2004

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 **Department of  
Veterans Affairs**



# Quit Smoking

*It's the Best Thing You Can Do for Your Health!*

By Laura York and Dr. Scott Sherman

**S**moking is the single most preventable cause of death in the United States. It is also the leading cause of death and illness among veterans. About 1 in 4 veterans treated by the VA have a smoking-related illness. However, many veterans have successfully kicked the habit. They and their families are living longer, healthier lives because of it. **In fact, most Americans who have ever smoked have now quit—and you can too!** If you are a smoker suffering from tobacco-related health problems, quitting now will help prevent them from getting worse. If you smoke but do not have any related health problems, quitting smoking now will help keep you healthy.



## Three Common Myths About Quitting

### ◆ “I’m too old to quit.”

**No one is too old** to benefit from quitting. Many veterans who have successfully quit were smokers for several decades. And your chances of quitting are not related to your age. Studies show that a person smoking for 60 years is just as likely to successfully quit as one smoking for six years.

### ◆ “The damage to my health has already been done—there’s no point in quitting now.”

**The damage caused by smoking is not irreversible.** It is never too late to stop smoking and improve your health! Your risk of developing tobacco-related cancer, coronary heart disease, emphysema, stroke, and other illnesses **will decrease** significantly if you stop smoking—even if you are a lifetime smoker. The people you live with will be healthier, too. Each day you are smoke-free will add to your life expectancy and you will find you feel better, breathe easier, and have more energy (and you will be saving money you can spend on other things).



### ◆ “I’ve tried quitting before but I couldn’t—it’s hopeless.”

**Very few people are able to quit successfully on their first try.** Because smoking is an addiction, quitting is hard and it is common to have a relapse. Most people who successfully quit have to make several attempts before they succeed. Don’t give up just because you couldn’t quit before. It is very hard to quit cold turkey—the most effective way is with a combination of counseling/support groups, lifestyle changes and medications. Remember: the more intensive your treatment plan, the higher your chances for success.

## What You Can Do Today to Stop Smoking

If you are thinking of quitting, there is help available for you from your health care provider, in-person support groups and telephone counseling. Each of these sources can provide ways to (1) help you understand *why* you smoke, (2) develop a quit plan that’s right for you, and (3) provide support for you while you are quitting.

The VA strongly recommends that you use medications to help you quit smoking. Using either nicotine patches or bupropion (Zyban®) doubles your chances of successfully quitting. In August 2003, the VA changed its policy to ensure that medications are available to help all smokers who want to quit. Ask your VA provider for more details.

### ■ **Join** one of the VA’s Smoking Cessation Programs.

Programs are available at most VA medical centers. **These programs have the highest rate of success.** They typically require several visits over a few months. At each visit, trained staff members help you quit.

### ■ **Talk** to your health care provider.

If you can’t or don’t wish to attend a smoking cessation program, talk to your VA primary care provider. He or she can prescribe smoking cessation medications for you and help you set up an individual “quit plan” that’s right for you. He or she can also tell you about the strategies you can use to quit smoking for good.

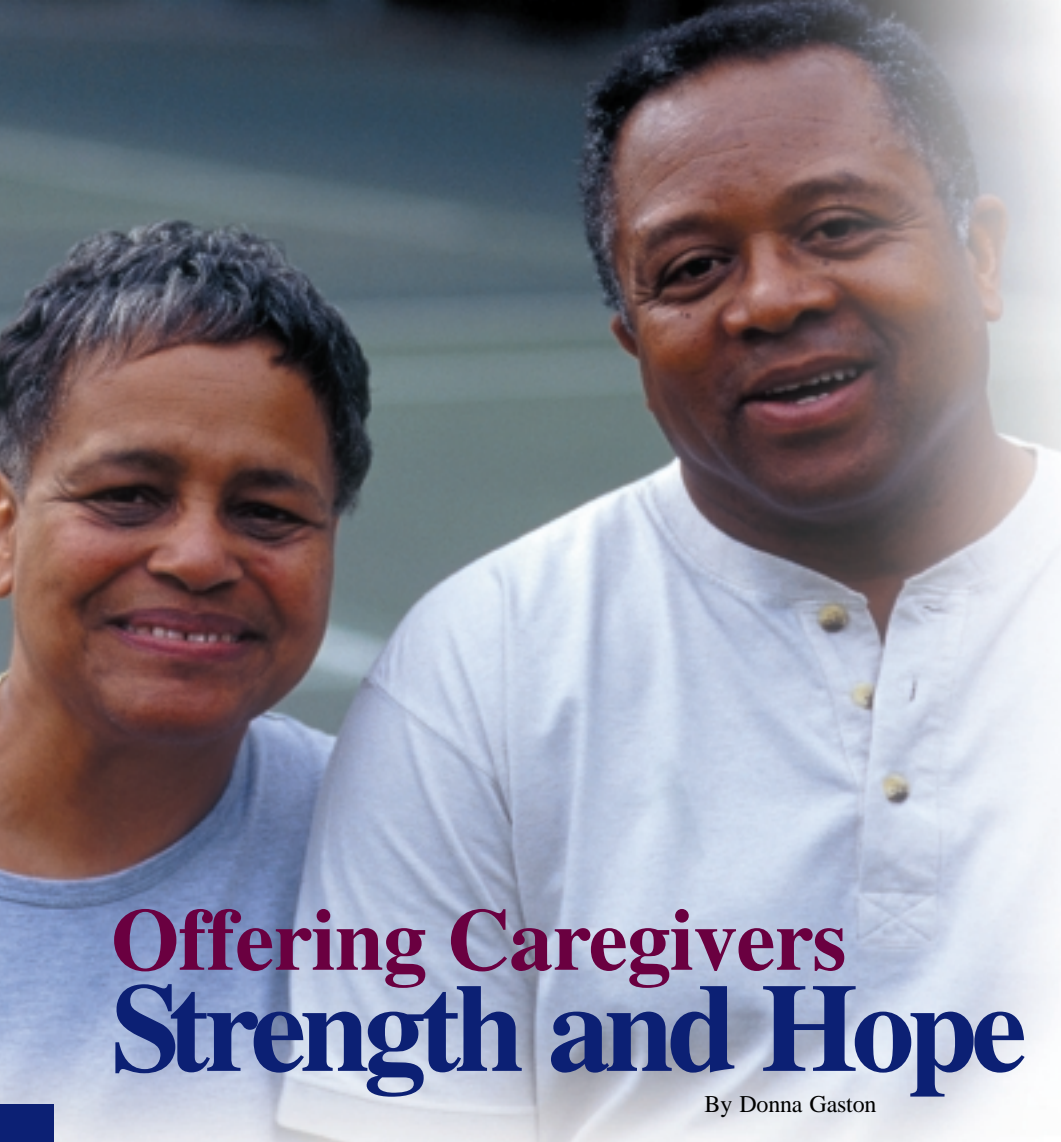
### ■ **Call** the California Smokers’ Helpline at 1-800-NO-BUTTS.

This is a free telephone program funded by the California Department of Health that has helped thousands of Californians like you to quit smoking. The Helpline staff will work with you to create a quit plan that is right for you. (This program is only open to California residents, but Nevada residents can call the National Cancer Institute at 1-800-4-CANCER). If you have Internet access, another good resource for information is [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov), a site created by the National Cancer Institute.

### ■ **Ask** your family and friends to help you.

They can do this by not smoking around you, giving you encouragement and helping you develop new, healthier habits.

It isn’t easy to quit smoking. It takes effort and willpower to break an addiction to tobacco. But remember that millions of Americans have stopped smoking. **You can be one of them!**



# Offering Caregivers Strength and Hope

By Donna Gaston

When your life partner or family member is chronically ill, your shared life changes forever. Some of us may decide to let the changes brought on by our loved one's illness sweep us away and withdraw from the situation while others draw together and face their worst fears.

Consider this: When an illness first becomes evident, an individual is often at the critical-care stage. By the time the person has recovered enough to leave the hospital, everyone just wants to get back to the comfortable and familiar routines of home. However, the familiar routines don't always work. Everyone in the house is affected by an illness in the family...even the pets.

Most caregivers go through a series of emotional reactions to their circumstances including fear, depression, resentment, relief and resignation. For those dealing with an illness that periodically causes a crisis, this cycle of reactions can happen

over and over.

Caregivers who seem to cope the best are those who can admit their feelings. Knowing exactly where you stand emotionally can be the catalyst that helps you move on to the next stage.

Some points to keep in mind as a caregiver include the need to face changes, accept them as a part of your life and enlist help from family and friends. Although the changes associated with having a sick family member are disruptive and painful, caregivers need to be strong to face the ups and downs.

As a caregiver you need to believe in yourself, knowing you are doing the best that you can. Realize that the most profound change brought on by the illness is the change in one's self. Caregivers with the most success in getting themselves and others through stressful circumstances are those with a strong sense of self, self-preservation, self-love, self-reliance, self-

confidence and even on occasion selfishness and acceptance of their feelings.

## *Where to look for help:*

Caregivers can find help by contacting social services or human services through Eldercare Locator, a free nationwide government service designed to help families find support information. You can use their toll free number 1-800-677-1116 or website at [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov) to find out about community-based services in your loved one's neighborhood anywhere in the United States. Some of these services include:

- ▲ Home delivered meals
- ▲ Transportation
- ▲ Legal service
- ▲ Housing options
- ▲ Recreation and social events
- ▲ Adult day care
- ▲ Senior center programs
- ▲ Home health services
- ▲ Elder abuse prevention
- ▲ Nursing home and omnibus service

If your loved one is a veteran, VA social work services can help you to integrate medical care with community-based services that promote independence in the daily lives of your loved ones.

## *Help for you*

The person most often overlooked in the caring process is the caregiver.

It is critical not to neglect your own needs. You'll be a less effective caregiver in the long run if you cannot admit to your own limitations and play on your strengths.

*Here are a few tips:*

1. Learn as much as you can about your loved one's medical condition so you know what to expect and what problems to anticipate. You'll be better equipped to organize the home environment and set up routines to minimize disruption and maximize the quality of family life for all members.
2. Don't try to play the martyr and take everything on yourself. Let other family members and friends know that you can't do it without their help. Share the responsibility among them.
3. Get appropriate legal and financial advice from the start. Make sure every detail is nailed down, so you can concentrate on the important business of caregiving.
4. Seek out other caregivers for information, comfort and a "reality check." Look for caregiver support groups for emotional support and resource information.
5. Make sure you get regular breaks to restore your energy and sense of self, so you can better carry out your duties as a caregiver. Allow yourself time to do whatever it is you like to do.
6. Accept changes in the patient's behavior. You will be challenged frequently. Remember to simplify, reassure and reinforce things for the patient.
7. Use your body wisely to prevent back injuries to both you and the patient.
8. If you have put your loved one in a nursing home, try not to feel guilty. You've done everything you can for your loved one and it is no longer enough.

## Flu Shots

*– It's not too late!*



- ✓ Flu shots are your best protection against the flu. Protect yourself and your loved ones.
- ✓ Flu shots prevent death. Each year over 20,000 people in the U.S. die because of the flu. Most are over 65 years old. More people die from the flu than from any other vaccine-preventable disease. The flu is far more dangerous than a bad cold. It is a disease of the lungs, and can lead to pneumonia.
- ✓ Flu shots prevent severe illness. The flu puts about 114,000 people in the hospital each year in the U.S.
- ✓ Flu shots protect other people. People who live with or care for others who are at high risk of serious illness from the flu need a flu shot. They can give the flu to these people if they get the flu themselves.

*Flu shots are free for all veterans enrolled with the VA – It's not too late. Get yours today!*

## Plan for the Unexpected

**Emergency Supply Kit.** With fires, floods, and earthquakes, every home needs to have an emergency supply kit available if the unthinkable should occur.

**Suggested items include:**

- ◆ Battery powered radio and flashlights. Don't forget the extra batteries.
- ◆ First aid kit with instruction manual
- ◆ Extra keys
- ◆ Extra glasses
- ◆ Copies of important documents - put them in a safe, easily accessible place.
- ◆ Water (1 gallon/person/day). Plan for a 3 day supply.
- ◆ Canned food with manual can opener
- ◆ Extra medication
- ◆ Cash – small bills such as \$1's & \$5's are best.
- ◆ Sturdy shoes
- ◆ Cell phone with charger
- ◆ Fire extinguisher



# Thank You

We would like to thank all of our readers for returning the planning survey titled “Are we meeting your needs?” Many of you not only returned the survey card but also sent some very nice letters about your experiences with our health care system. We truly appreciate your input.

**We learned from the survey that the top three improvements you would like to see include:**

- 1. Reduced waits for care**
- 2. Better customer service**
- 3. Improved telephone services**

Reducing the time it takes to get an appointment and providing excellent customer service are important goals that we are working hard to achieve. As a result of your input during the last survey, we have piloted weekend and evening clinics at all sites. They have been a success and we plan to expand those in the future. We have also opened a new clinic in South Los Angeles and we are studying the addition of clinics in Laughlin, NV and Santa Maria, CA. The wait for primary care appointments at most of our facilities is less than 30 days and the wait for specialty appointments is improving.

As a result of this survey, we will be studying the problems with our telephone services through veterans’ focus groups. We plan to have solutions to those problems identified and implemented this year.

As always, if you have a problem that cannot wait for a scheduled appointment, all of our facilities have same day appointments available. In those situations we encourage you to call your primary care team or our TeleCare – Nurse Advice number at 1-877-252-4866 to receive medical advice or an earlier appointment.

Thank you for taking the time to help us continue improving the care we provide.



## VA Seeks Former POWs For Possible Benefit Awards

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is asking former prisoners of war not currently using VA benefits to contact VA to find out if they may be eligible for disability compensation and other services.

VA has expanded policies to cover increasing numbers of former POWs as new illnesses related to captivity have been found.

VA is asking former POWs not receiving benefits who did not receive a VA letter recently to call the department at 1-800-827-1000. More information about VA services for former POWs is available at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/POW/>.



## Providing safe care for Veterans is our primary concern.

Please tell us your ideas for improving patient safety at your VA Medical Center. Send an email message to VISN 22 Patient Safety, at [V22PatientSafety@med.va.gov](mailto:V22PatientSafety@med.va.gov)





The Draft National CARES Plan has been submitted for final review with a decision expected in January. CARES is a process to prepare VA facilities to meet future veteran health care needs through an objective assessment of its infrastructure. The CARES process assesses the size, mission and location of existing facilities compared with the expected utilization of health care services for its projected enrollees. CARES is another step in the dynamic improvement process that characterizes the VA Health Care System.

## National CARES Achievements

**Proposed Expansions:** 2 new hospitals (Orlando and Las Vegas) and 1 replacement hospital (Denver) proposed for the VA.

**DOD Partnerships:** 21 high priority VA/DOD collaborations.

**Improved Primary Care Access:** 48 high priority Community Clinics proposed in areas with greatest needs.

**Growth in Special Population Centers:** 2 new Blind Rehabilitation Centers and 4 new Spinal Cord Injury Centers.

**VA Cost-Saving Proposals:** 13 potential campus realignments; 11 facilities proposed for further consolidation of services.

**Critical Care Access Hospitals (CAH):** New VA concept for small acute care facilities; 7 medical centers proposed for conversion.

**Reduction in Vacant Space:** Approximately 3.6 million square feet reduced.

**Improved Hospital Access:** Improved from 72% to 84% enrollees meeting guidelines.

**Maintained High Level of Outpatient Access:** 74% of enrollees have access to primary care within 30 miles.

**One - VA Collaborative Opportunities:** 6 VBA and 9 NCA high priority proposed co-locations.

We encourage you to go to the CARES website and review the Draft VA National CARES Plan including Appendix A -VISN Market Plan Executive Summaries and specific VISN 22 plans at [www.va.gov/cares](http://www.va.gov/cares).

## New On-Line Resources

**My HealtheVet** Website available at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov) provides online health information for veterans, their families, and clinicians. Veterans will be able to explore interesting and essential health topics, research diseases and conditions, learn about veteran-specific conditions, understand medication and treatment options and more.

**VA Kids** Website available at [www.va.gov/kids](http://www.va.gov/kids) is designed to help kids find out what it means to be a veteran. The site has separate sections for teachers and students in different grades.

## VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Vet Centers

### Anaheim Vet Center

859 South Harbor Boulevard  
Anaheim, CA 92805-5157  
562-596-3101

### Corona Vet Center

800 Magnolia Ave., Suite 110  
Corona, CA 92879  
909-734-0525

### East Los Angeles Vet Center

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard  
Suite 140  
Commerce, CA 90022-5147  
213-728-9966

### Las Vegas Vet Center

1040 E. Sahara Avenue, Suite 1  
Las Vegas, NV 89503  
702-388-6369

### Los Angeles Vet Center

1045 W. Redondo Beach Boulevard  
Suite 150  
Gardena, CA 90247-4129  
310-767-1221

### San Bernardino Vet Center

155 W. Hospitality Lane, Suite 140  
San Bernardino, CA 92480  
909-890-0797

### San Diego Vet Center

2900 Sixth Avenue  
San Diego, CA 92103-1003  
619-294-2040

### Santa Barbara Vet Center

1300 Santa Barbara Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101-2017  
805-564-2345

### Sepulveda Vet Center

9737 Haskell Avenue  
Sepulveda, CA 91343-1618  
818-892-9227

### Vista Vet Center

1830 West Drive, Suites 103/104  
Vista, CA 92083-6125  
760-643-2070

### West Los Angeles Vet Center

5730 Uplander Way, Suite 100  
Culver City, CA 90230-6615  
310-641-0326

# REACHING US IS EASY

## ★ VA Medical Centers

**VA Southern Nevada  
Healthcare System**  
P.O. Box 360001  
Las Vegas, NV 89036  
702-636-3000

**Mike O'Callaghan  
Federal Hospital**  
4700 Las Vegas Boulevard North  
Las Vegas, NV 89191  
702-653-2215

**VA Loma Linda  
Healthcare System**  
11201 Benton Street  
Loma Linda, CA 92357  
909-825-7084

**VA Long Beach  
Healthcare System**  
5901 East Seventh Street  
Long Beach, CA 90822  
562-826-8000

**VA San Diego  
Healthcare System**  
3350 La Jolla Village Drive  
San Diego, CA 92161  
858-552-8585

**VA Greater Los Angeles  
Healthcare System**  
11301 Wilshire Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90073  
310-478-3711

## ▲ Community Clinics

**Anaheim**  
1801 W. Romneya Drive  
3rd Floor, Suite 303  
Anaheim, CA 92801  
714-780-5400

**Antelope Valley**  
547 W. Lancaster Blvd.  
Lancaster, CA 93536  
661-729-8655

**Bakersfield**  
1801 Westwind Drive  
Bakersfield, CA 93301  
661-632-1800

**Cabrillo**  
2001 River Avenue  
Long Beach, CA 90806  
562-388-8000

**Chula Vista**  
835 3rd Avenue  
Chula Vista, CA 91910  
619-409-1600



**Corona**  
800 Magnolia Avenue #101  
Corona, CA 92879  
909-817-8820

**East Los Angeles**  
5400 E. Olympic Boulevard #150  
City of Commerce, CA 90040  
323-725-7557

**Escondido**  
815 East Pennsylvania Avenue  
Escondido, CA 92025  
760-466-7020

**Gardena**  
1251 Redondo Beach Boulevard  
3rd Floor  
Gardena, CA 90247  
310-851-4705

**Henderson**  
2920 Green Valley Parkway,  
Suite 215  
Henderson, NV 89014  
702-456-3825

**Imperial Valley**  
528 G Street  
Brawley, CA 92227  
760-344-1881

**Lancaster**  
547 W. Lancaster Blvd  
Lancaster, CA 93534  
661-729-8655

**Las Vegas**  
MASH Village  
1581 N. Main Street  
Las Vegas, NV 89101  
702-386-3140

**Lompoc**  
1111 E. Ocean Avenue, Suite 8  
Lompoc, CA 93436  
805-736-7767

**Los Angeles**  
351 E. Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
213-253-5000

**Mission Valley**  
8810 Rio San Diego Drive  
San Diego, CA 92108  
619-400-5000

**Oxnard**  
250 W. Citrus Grove Avenue  
Suite 150  
Oxnard, CA 93030  
805-983-6384

**Palm Desert**  
41-865 Boardwalk, Suite 103  
Palm Desert, CA 92211  
760-341-5570

**Pahrump**  
2100 E. Calvada Boulevard  
Pahrump, NV 89048  
775-751-2053

**Pasadena**  
1350 N. Altadena Dr.  
Pasadena, CA 91007  
626-296-9514

**San Luis Obispo**  
1288 Moro St., #200  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401  
805-543-1233

**Santa Ana**  
Bristol Medical Center  
2740 S. Bristol Street  
1st Floor, Suite 100  
Santa Ana, CA 92704  
714-825-3500

**Santa Barbara**  
4440 Calle Real  
Santa Barbara, CA 93110  
805-683-1491

**Sepulveda**  
16111 Plummer Street  
Sepulveda, CA 91343  
818-891-7711

**South Los Angeles**  
3737 E. Martin Luther King Jr.  
Blvd., Suite 515  
Lynwood, CA 90262  
1-800-455-0264

**Sun City**  
28125 Bradley Road  
Suite 130  
Sun City, CA 92586  
909-672-1931

**Upland**  
1238 E. Arrow Highway,  
No. 100  
Upland, CA 91786  
909-946-5348

**Victorville**  
12138 Industrial Boulevard  
Suite 120  
Victorville, CA 92392  
760-951-2599

**Vista**  
1840 West Drive  
Vista, CA 92083  
760-643-2000

**Whittier/Santa Fe Springs**  
10210 Orr and Day Road  
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670  
562-864-5565

**Veterans' Health Today**  
5901 E. 7th St.  
Long Beach, CA 90822

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